

# Army Transformation: The Human Condition of Soldiering

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**I**N THE LATE 1990s, the Chief of Staff of the Army (CSA) announced that Fort Lewis, Washington, would be the site of the Army's initial effort at Transformation. The Transformation challenge was to change personnel procedures, equipment, mission analysis, and leader training to transform the "culture of the unit" from that of a heavy force to one that reflected a common warrior culture.

The term "work in progress" is frequently used to describe Army Transformation, but what did this actually mean to the soldiers of the 1st Battalion, 23d Infantry Regiment (the Tomahawks), under the command of Lieutenant Colonel John Nickolson, Jr.? The 1-23d was one of the initial units to undergo Transformation.

The first interim brigade combat team (IBCT) had no doctrine, no table of organization and equipment, and no established tactics, techniques, and procedures. All it had was the Army Vision, the CSA's oral directive, the draft IBCT operations and organizational (O/O) concept paper, and a stack of PowerPoint slides that described the IBCT. Deputy Commanding General for Transformation Major General James Dubik told Tomahawk leaders not to wait for the U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command to write the doctrine, but to begin Transformation at once.

The climate within the 1-23d encouraged critical thinking and dialogue at all levels of the organization. Soldiers and leaders accepted that their ideas would be challenged. No one, no matter what rank, held a monopoly on truth. Many ideas were intuitively accepted and implemented. An excellent example of creative, innovative thinking occurred when armor crewmen joined combined arms companies.

They developed modified armor qualification tables that employed the medium gun system (MGS) in close and urban engagements. They also developed an armor crew competition and an MGS creed.

The leaders of the 1-23d had been characterized as Ranger-centric, implying that the battalion was trying to mold itself into a Ranger battalion. This perception revealed a misunderstanding of Transformation on many levels and a failure to understand the combination of cultures occurring within every IBCT battalion during Transformation. In the 1-23d's case, a mechanized infantry unit became a combined arms unit that moved mounted and dismounted. Success required combining the best of all cultures—heavy, light, and special operations.

The Tomahawks used Ranger school and 75th Ranger Regimental standards to accomplish Transformation as quickly as possible, but this was not as simple as just having the leaders of the 1-23d announce that the unit would adopt Ranger standards. Soldiers who lived by the standards and understood their application had to be seeded throughout the unit. Unit leaders had to tie Ranger standards to Army standards, to the Tomahawks' heritage and battlefield record, and to acceptance by noncommissioned officers (NCOs), many of whom had never served in the Rangers. Taking these actions put the 1-23d on the Transformation azimuth intended for the entire Army and on course to adopt a warrior ethos for all soldiers.

## Training

In April 2000, the 1-23d began training for 14 months without pause. The unit performed only 1 week of Red Cycle duties (postwide commitments).



A 1-23d Bradley crew takes part in a platoon live fire exercise conducted by the 3d Brigade, 2d Infantry Division, Fort Lewis Training Area, Washington.

The training followed the Army's eight-step training model:

1. Plan the training.
2. Train and certify the leaders.
3. Recon the site.
4. Issue the plan.
5. Rehearse.
6. Execute.
7. Conduct the after-action review.
8. Retrain.

The initial focus was on step 2—train and certify leaders—to ensure that one standard of training was common throughout the entire unit, regardless of the task being trained. Four areas of individual and small unit collective tasks that step 2 affected were Squad React to Contact/Squad Attack, Close Quarters Marksmanship (CQM), Close Quarters Combat (CQC), and the pre-Ranger program.

In January 2000, the Army trained and certified battalion leaders during a leadership professional development (LPD) session. The soldiers who attended formed nine-man infantry squads from their respective companies. CQM and CQC seemed extremely foreign to most of the unit, but CQM and CQC took top priority because fighting would be in close, restrictive terrain and built-up areas. Using

Ranger Regimental Training Circular 350-1-2, *Close Quarters Combat Program of Instruction*, as a reference, battalion leaders became certified on CQM and CQC fundamentals.<sup>1</sup>

In Company A, only two soldiers had graduated from Ranger training. The ratio of Ranger-qualified personnel in the companies throughout the battalion was similar. Fostering a warrior culture in the 1-23d was a huge task.

To increase the number of Rangers in the battalion, pre-Ranger courses were run internally to evaluate candidates and to teach them the skills they would need to complete Ranger school. But battalion leaders encountered a problem: only junior soldiers volunteered for Ranger training. No squad or team leaders volunteered. Of the 27 squad leader positions, 18 were coded for Ranger-qualified personnel. Because of the lack of volunteers, Nicholson realized that the battalion needed to make a culture shift.

The companies of the 1-23d went through 2 weeks of squad training and 3 weeks of platoon training, including full-spectrum situational training exercises (STX) and live-fire exercises. Then, the battalion entered a phase of training designed to develop a full-spectrum company capability. Training

consisted of three company-level STX modules, interspersed with digital training for unit leaders. This period lasted from October 2000 to April 2001 and included three company STXs: three command post exercises; individual and collective digital training; and two staff exercises designed to refine the units' digital military decisionmaking process.

Company training culminated in a combined arms live-fire exercise (CALFEX) in April 2001. The CALFEX trained the unit and its leaders on integrating the combat power of the combined arms companies with the headquarters company and battalion tactical operations center. The scenario that the 1-23d built was joint. The operation was a high-intensity mission. The battalion was a follow-on force to the 2d Ranger Battalion of the 75th Ranger Regiment, which had seized an airfield in a fictional country. Company leaders grappled with the tactical problems of employing all the speed, information, and weapons systems at their disposal.

The battalion's lead elements were delivered to Gray Army Airfield, Fort Lewis, Washington, on Boeing C-17 Globemasters—a first-ever deployment by air of a light armored vehicle III (LAVIII)-equipped unit in Army history. IBCT rifle companies created a synergy of dominating movement that the Army has never seen before. The synergy legitimized the O/O construct of the IBCT to the people that mattered the most—the soldiers in the unit.

The CALFEX demonstrated the need to transition rapidly and smoothly from one phase of an operation to another: disembarkation; movement to an assembly area; conducting a tactical movement, and so on.

## Tomahawk Agoge

A professional LPD—the Tomahawk Agoge—was initiated within the battalion to instill the warrior ethos throughout the battalion. The Tomahawk “Agoge” was named after the Spartans, who trained eligible male children as a group from early childhood until their acceptance as “peers” or equals within the city-state. The battalion commander used Tomahawk Agoge initially as a physical and mental vehicle through which to develop his most junior officers, but soon expanded it to include all leaders.

The Agoge trained leaders physically and mentally through battalion commander-led physical training, which all the lieutenants in the battalion attended. The physical training sessions demonstrated “what right looked like” and gave commanders an oppor-

tunity to evaluate each officer. During a leadership-training event, officers soon found themselves deprived of all nourishment except water. For 3 days, without food, they conducted military operations that encompassed the entire spectrum of scenarios that the IBCT might encounter, including an air assault raid, recovery of a downed aircrew during an extremely condensed planning cycle, and nighttime police actions or small-scale contingency raids in an urban environment, using the LAVs. The event culminated with a limited visibility Zodiac boat movement and a raid on a built-up area.

The experience of being deprived of something, whether food, water, shelter, or any other desirable commodity, is not foreign to today's soldiers, but privation does not usually occur during Army training exercises. Still, privation is the foundation of training for many elite Army units as well as other special operations forces worldwide. Suffering can develop leaders who never quit leading and soldiers who never quit soldiering.

To challenge 1-23d leaders mentally, the battalion commander initiated an LPD reading program. Each company received a book and conducted an LPD session that used the book as its foundation. The books included—

- *Gates of Fire: An Epic Novel of the Battle of Thermopylae* by Steven Pressfield.<sup>2</sup>

- *Ender's Game* by Orson Scott Card.<sup>3</sup>

- *Black Hawk Down: A Story of Modern War* by Mark Bowden.<sup>4</sup>

- *This Kind of War: The Classic Korean War History* by T.R. Fehrenbach with Gordon Sullivan.<sup>5</sup>

- *War and Anti-War: Making Sense of Today's Global Chaos* by Alvin Toffler and Heidi Toffler.<sup>6</sup>

The way the 1-23d transformed from a heavy mechanized infantry battalion to an IBCT might not be the perfect template for change, but it is a good one. **MR**

## NOTES

1. U.S. Army Regimental Training Circular 350-1-2, *Close Quarters Combat Program of Instruction*. (No publishing information given.)

2. Steven Pressfield, *Gates of Fire: An Epic Novel of the Battle of Thermopylae* (New York: Doubleday, 1998).

3. Orson Scott Card, *Ender's Game* (New York: Tor Books, 1985, revised 1991).

4. Mark Bowden, *Black Hawk Down: A Story of Modern War* (Boston: Atlantic Monthly Press, 1999).

5. T.R. Fehrenbach with Gordon Sullivan, *This Kind of War: The Classic Korean War History* (Dulles, VA: Brassey's Inc., 2001).

6. Alvin Toffler and Heidi Toffler, *War and Anti-War: Making Sense of Today's Global Chaos* (New York: Warner Books, 1995).

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